

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2085

S E C R E T BANGKOK 5224

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: MARR, TH

SUBJECT: FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND

REF: (A) BANGKOK 3781; (B) STATE 52742; (C) BANGKOK 5138;
(D) STATE 31539

SUMMARY: EMBASSY HAS REANALYZED QUESTION OF U.S. FORCE LEVELS IN THAILAND IN LIGHT OF NEW GOVERNMENT'S POLICY STATEMENT, CURRENT EVENTS IN INDOCHINA AND CHARGE'S CONVERSATION MARCH 27 WITH FOREIGN MINISTER. WE CONCLUDE THAT WHILE WASHINGTON PLANS FOR REMAINDER OF FY '75 MIGHT BE NEGOTIABLE, SOMEWHAT DEEPER CUTS DURING THAT TIME FRAME ARE DESIRABLE. SITUATION IS FRAGILE AND COULD CHANGE RAPIDLY. WE SHOULD RETAIN MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY FOR PERIOD BEYOND JUNE 30. END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS TOWARD U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND ARE STILL FAR FROM CLEAR, MARCH 27 CONVERSATION BETWEEN CHARGE AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHOONHAVAN SUGGESTS WE HAVE SOME ROOM FOR MANEUVER. CHATCHAI WAS QUITE CLEAR THAT ONE-YEAR DEADLINE FOR TOTAL WITHDRAWAL NEED NOT BE TAKEN LITERALLY, AND THAT NEW RTG WOULD BEGIN ACTIVELY LAYING GROUNDWORK SO AS TO BE ABLE TO INVOKE QUALIFIER PINNING U.S. WITHDRAWALS TO SECURITY SITUATION IN THIS REGION IF RTG DEEMED THIS TO BE IN ITS INTERESTS. IT IS EQUALLY CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT NEW RTG FEELS IMPELLED FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS TO MAKE SOME PUBLIC SHOWING OF MOVEMENT TOWARD U.S. WITHDRAWALS. ACCORDING TO THIS SCRIPT, SUCH MOVEMENT, EVEN IF LIMITED, WOULD DEFUSE IMMEDIATE PRESSURES AND

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ENABLE RTG TO PREPARE FOR MODIFICATION OF POLICY STATEMENT SO AS

TO DEFER ONE-YEAR DEADLINE.

2. GIVEN THIS SITUATION AND CURRENT UNCERTAINTIES, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD IN OUR MEETINGS WITH THE RTG NEXT WEEK AGREE TO A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE REDUCTION TO TAKE PLACE BY JUNE 30 (PREFERABLY BELOW 20,000). TOWARD END OF THIS FISCAL YEAR WE CAN REASSESS NEXT TRANCHE IN LIGHT OF SITUATION IN AREA, U.S. POLICY AND BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS, THAI DESIRES AND PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUATION OF PRESENT THAI GOVERNMENT.

3. WE ASSUME REF (D) REPRESENTS CURRENT U.S. GOALS FOR FORCES IN THAILAND. FIRST STAGE WOULD INVOLVE REDUCTION TO 21,300 SPACES BY 30 JUNE 1975. WE BELIEVE THAT SOMEWHAT GREATER REDUCTION WOULD BE EXPEDIENT AND WOULD INCREASE OUR ABILITY TO STAVE OFF MUCH QUICKER AND DEEPER REDUCTIONS DURING REMAINDER CALENDAR YEAR 1975 IF WE CONTINUE TO WANT TO AVOID THESE. ALTHOUGH CHATCHAI AT THIS MOMENT SEEMS PREPARED TO SETTLE FOR RELATIVELY MODEST CUTS, HE COULD EASILY CHANGE HIS MIND ONCE DISCUSSIONS BEGIN. IT COULD, MOREOVER, TURN OUT THAT CHATCHAI IS BEING OVERLY SANGUINE AS TO WHAT IS NEEDED IN THE SHORT TERM TO DEFUSE PRESSURES AGAINST U.S. PRESENCE IN THAILAND WITHIN PARLIAMENT AND ELSEWHERE. WE WOULD CONSIDER IT TACTICALLY DESIRABLE TO CUT BELOW 20,000 BY JUNE 30, 1975. IF, HOWEVER, WASHINGTON CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT 21,300 LEVEL IS ESSENTIAL, WE WILL SEEK TO ATTAIN IT IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THAI.

4. THEREAFTER, AS INDICATED ABOVE, WE NEED TO STAY FAIRLY LOOSE BUT AS THINGS NOW LOOK WE THINK IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO MAKE FURTHER SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTIONS DURING REMAINDER OF CALENDAR YEAR 1975. (IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT FOR THAI PURPOSES, WE ARE DEALING WITH CALENDAR RATHER THAN FISCAL YEARS.) WE HAVE REPORTED ELSEWHERE THAT HIGH-RANKING THAI OFFICIALS, INCLUDING KRIT AND KRIANGSAK, THOUGHT A REDUCTION OF AT LEAST 10,000 (I.E., SAME AS IN CALENDAR 1974) WAS CONTEMPLATED BY U.S. FOR CALENDAR 1975. KRIT THINKS THIS MIGHT SUFFICE FOR THAI DOMESTIC POLITICAL PURPOSES.

5. IF WE VIEW THIS IN TERMS OF SPACES, REDUCTION OF 10,000 WOULD TAKE AS STARTING POINT CURRENT AUTHORIZATION APPROXIMATELY 27,000 AND WOULD THUS BRING US DOWN TO 17,000 BY END CALENDAR 1975, BUT WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO CUT THIS CONSIDERABLY

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FURTHER. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, HAVE TO MAKE THAT DECISION NOW. IF IT WERE STILL POSSIBLE TO SHOW SOME RELEVANCE OF OUR FORCES IN THAILAND TO SOUTHEAST ASIA SITUATION AT THAT TIME, RTG MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO SUSPEND PRESSURES FOR FURTHER WITHDRAWALS, EXPALINING TO PRE-CONDITIONED THAI PUBLIC OPINION THAT THIS WAS REQUIRED IN INTEREST OF THAILAND'S SECURITY.

6. OUR CRYSTAL BALL IS, OF COURSE, QUITE CLOUDY. IF CAMBODIA

FALLS, THIS WILL FURTHER DETRACT FROM CREDIBILITY OF OUR FORCES IN THAILAND IN RELATION TO SECURITY OF INDOCHINA. THIS COULD INTENSIFY THAI PRESSURES FOR OUR OUSTER, OR ON OTHER HAND COULD GIVE OUR PRESENCE HERE NEW LIFE IF IT WERE SHOWN TO BE RELATED TO THE IMMEDIATE DEFENSE OF THAILAND ITSELF. WE ALSO CANNOT FORESEE HOW LONG KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT WILL REMAIN INPOWER OR WHAT POLICIES MIGHT BE ADOPTED BY A SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT. THIS ALSO ARGUES FOR RETAINING FLEXIBILITY.

7. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS REPORTED REF (C) WISHES TO GET ON WITH FORMAL TALKS UNDER MFA AUSPICES. WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD ENTER SUCH TALKS NEXT WEEK. REQUEST NEW INSTRUCTIONS SOONEST BASED ON CONSIDERATIONS SET FORTH HEREIN.
MASTERS

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